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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 004277

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAI POLITICAL UPDATE: JOCKEYING INTENSIFIES

REF: A. BANGKOK 03916 (WHAT'S THAKSIN UP TO?)

- [1](#)B. BANGKOK 004041 (STEAK WITH THAKSIN)
- [1](#)C. BANGKOK 04181 ("UNCLE SAM I'M BEING BULLIED!")
- [1](#)D. BANGKOK 004211 (SCENESETTER AND POLITICAL UPDATE FOR ADMIRAL FALLON)
- [1](#)E. BANGKOK 004212 (AND THE PAD MARCHED ON)

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR SUSAN M. SUTTON. REASON 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Privy Council chairman Prem Tinsulanonda struck back at PM Thaksin on July 14 in a speech to military cadets. The PM appeared to step back from his normally strident self over the weekend, with an appeal to reconciliation, even as he moves to set the stage for a new election October 15. The opposition parties remain opposed to a new election under the current, controversial Election Commission. Speculation that members of the PM's party may be preparing to jump ship--or toss Thaksin over the side--is making its way into the press. The opposition People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) continues to tear into the PM over his letter to President Bush and is preparing for a final push to unseat Thaksin starting July 19. PAD leader Sonthi Limthongkul may be running out of money. Finally, the palace announced that the King will be undergoing surgery to alleviate a long-standing spinal problem. End Summary.

MILITARY JOCKEYING CONTINUES

[1](#)2. (C) In a bold response to the most recent coup rumors, speculation over preparations for the October military reshuffle (ref D) and Thaksin's thinly veiled attack on him earlier this month (refs A,B), Privy Council chairman (and former Army Chief) Prem Tinsulanonda paid a high-profile visit to the Chulachomklao Military Academy on July 14. Prem--who arrived in uniform with former Army Chiefs Chawalit Yongchaiyudh, Surayud Chulanont, Oud Buengbon and Pongthem Thespratheeep alongside him--told the cadets, "in horse racing, horse owners hire jockeys to ride the horses. The jockeys do not own the horses. They just ride them. A government is like a jockey. It supervises soldiers, but the real owners are the country and the King...the government comes and goes."

[1](#)3. (C) Prem's comments--which landed on the front page of most papers Saturday--are only the first in a series of lectures he plans to give to cadets and soldiers over the next few weeks, to "raise awareness." Indeed, the press coverage of Prem's speech prompted the PM to publicly deny on July 15 that he specifically intends to sideline the current Army Chief--Sonthi Boonyaratglin--in favor of one of his

former classmates from his military academy days.

THAKSIN OPENS HIS ARMS

¶4. (SBU) In his weekly radio address on July 15, Thaksin announced that his caretaker government plans to submit the decree calling for a new election October 15 to the palace for approval by mid-August. The PM pleaded for "national reconciliation" and explained that he was not trying to cling to power, but to fulfill his constitutionally required duties. Thaksin urged all sides to come together. Officials from the opposition Democrat party did not publicly reject the new election date, but reiterated their demand that the controversial Election Commission (EC) be replaced before a new vote.

DISSENT IN TRT RANKS

¶5. (C) While the Democrats rejected the PM's call for a meeting to discuss reconciliation, speculation is mounting that members of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party have met without the PM to discuss a way out of the current morass. Thai-language press reported on July 18 that several cabinet-level TRT figures, including Minister of Commerce Somkid, Deputy PM Surakiat and Education Minister Chaturon, held a "secret" meeting on July 17 to discuss the political situation

THE OTHER SONTHI--RUNNING ON FUMES

¶6. (C) Following the high profile march of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) late last week to deliver

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letters of apology and protest to foreign embassies (refs C,E), the PAD convened at Lumpini park for their weekly broadcast on July 14. Although the crowd of hard-core PAD supporters barely topped an estimated 1,000 people, PAD leader Sonthi Limthongkul and his cohorts spent several hours dissecting Thaksin's letter to President Bush and attacking the PM. In a new twist, Sonthi also discussed the controversial book "The King Never Smiles" by an American journalist, which is very critical of the monarch. According to Sonthi, one of Thaksin's closest advisers played a key role in the development of the book. Details about the book have now been posted on Sonthi's "Manager" newspaper website and PAD elements may march on U.S. Embassy Bangkok to protest the book. Sonthi also said that the PAD plans to announce details about their "final effort" against Thaksin on July 19.

¶7. (C) According to several journalists who work for Sonthi, this new "final effort" against the PM may be a desperation move. The media magnate has apparently failed to pay both his local and foreign staff for nearly six weeks, citing the financial drain of ongoing lawsuits against him and his funding support for PAD activities. Some senior members of Sonthi's staff have even speculated that if Thaksin is not out of office by September, Sonthi will have to fold his tent and declare bankruptcy.

SURGERY FOR THE KING

¶8. (SBU) Local press reported on July 17 that the King will soon undergo surgery to alleviate a long-standing condition--lumbar spinal stenosis. According to newspaper accounts, the monarch has suffered from this problem--a pinching of the nerves running to his right leg--since 1995. The date of the surgery has not been released.

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